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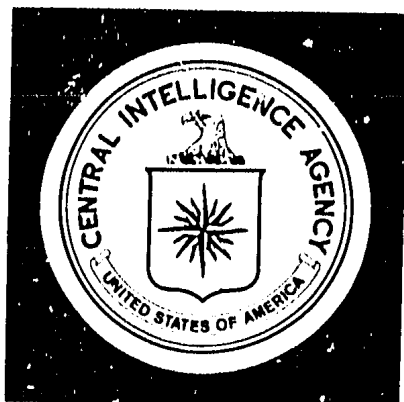
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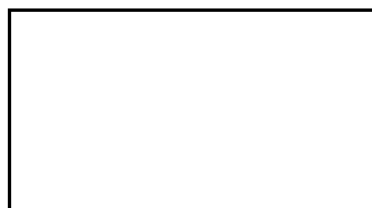
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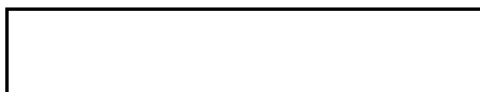


Developments in Indochina



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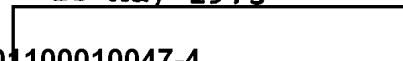
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122

25X

25 May 1973



Approved For Release 2005/06/09 : CIA-RDP85T00875R001100010047-4

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Approved For Release 2005/06/09 : CIA-RDP85T00875R001100010047-4

25X1

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25X1

CONTENTS

25 May 1973

CAMBODIA 1

The capabilities of the Cambodian Air Force for providing tactical air support to Cambodian army units remain quite limited, and although sorties could be increased, the air force would still have neither the firepower nor the proficiency to cope alone with the type of emergency combat situations that repeatedly confront the army.

25X1

25X1

SOUTH VIETNAM. 3

Several province chiefs have voiced their concern over the lack of sufficient intelligence on enemy units, particularly on local main force and guerrilla units in rural areas not controlled by government forces.

LAOS 4

The National Assembly, which convened on 11 May, is dominated by the right-wing Sananikone family faction, which hopes to force Souvanna to submit the cease-fire agreement to the assembly for ratification.

25X1

INTERNATIONAL 5

The Chinese were particularly reserved both in public and private commentary on Indochina while the Kissinger-Tho talks were going on in Paris. With the talks now in recess, Peking has come out with an authoritative "Commentator" article reiterating its view that American disengagement is essential to any solution in Cambodia.

25 May 1973

25X1

CAMBODIA

25X1

Phnom Penh's Air Arm

The capability of the Cambodian Air Force to provide tactical air support to Cambodian Army units is still quite limited. At present, the air force is flying about 15 T-28 sorties per day. Although it might be possible to double the number of flights by sharply reducing pilot training, the air force would lack the firepower or proficiency to cope alone with the type of emergency combat situations that repeatedly confront the army. As a result, the army has become increasingly dependent on a high level of US tactical air support. Without such support, the Communists probably would have overrun several besieged provincial capitals and would have been able to keep vital re-supply convoys from moving up the Mekong from South Vietnam to Phnom Penh.

The air force's capability for delivering supplies to army units in the field and to isolated provincial capitals is also limited. The addition of five C-123s will improve Phnom Penh's marginal transport facilities, but these aircraft will not become operational until mid-August, when the first crews will be available. As with tactical air support, US aircraft are making up the difference in meeting logistic requirements. Munitions and rice are being supplied regularly by US C-130s to such refugee-swollen urban centers as Svay Rieng (60,000 people), Takeo (30,000), and Kompong Thom (7,000). US C-130s also deliver munitions and other US military aid supplies to Phnom Penh, supplementing other deliveries of these items up the Mekong and up Route 4 from the seaport at Kompong Som. From January through April of this year, there was a monthly average of 175 C-130 air-landed sorties and 65.5 C-130 air-drop sorties in Cambodia.

25X1

25X1

25 May 1973

25X1

25X1

Approved For Release 2005/06/09 : CIA-RDP85T00875R001100010047-4

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SOUTH VIETNAM

25X1

Too Little Information

A number of province chiefs have recently voiced concern over a lack of sufficient intelligence on Communist strengths, intentions, and positions in rural areas not regularly patrolled by government forces. Most rely on reports from a few prisoners or ralliers that are often outdated or of questionable reliability.

Many province chiefs admit they are unaware of how much the Viet Cong have rebuilt their military and political capability in these areas. Although most of them estimate that the enemy is still weaker than the government, they anticipate that the Communists are preparing for stepped-up fighting, probably when the rainy season is over.

The problem, of course, is not a new one. There has rarely been a surfeit of intelligence on enemy units and activities in Vietnam, particularly on local main force and guerrilla units. The difficulties have increased sharply, however, with the elimination of the US ground military intelligence effort in Vietnam. Some ARVN units are not very aggressive in patrol and reconnaissance activities into isolated, rural areas. Moreover, the longer the gaps persist in intelligence on local units, the greater the danger of surprise attacks on government positions in some parts of the country.

25X1

25 May 1973

LAOS

25X1

The Calm Before the Assembly Storm

The right-wing Sananikone family faction, which strongly challenged Souvanna during last year's session of the National Assembly, has lost none of its political clout. In the initial meetings of the assembly session, which began on 11 May, family leader Phoui Sananikone was overwhelmingly elected to the assembly in a secret ballot. Pro-Sananikone deputies were selected to head most of the important committees.

According to press reports, Phoui recently stated that he would do his best to convince Souvanna to submit the cease-fire agreement to the assembly for ratification. In apparent preparation for a confrontation on this issue, the Sananikones have been seeking to buy off some of Souvanna's supporters. A confrontation, however, is not imminent because Phoui has left for a month's medical treatment in Bangkok. The lack of progress on negotiations to implement the agreement also contributes to the current relative calm in the assembly.

The Communists are clearly concerned over the possibility that the peace agreement will come before the assembly for approval. Lately their propaganda has been aimed at the "Phoui Sananikone clique," claiming that it is maneuvering to destroy the peace agreement. Pathet Lao negotiators in Vientiane have met privately with several assemblymen to urge that the Vientiane agreement not be presented to the assembly. Although the Communists hold that the National Assembly has no legal authority, they nonetheless recognize that any vote rejecting the agreement would be a vote of no confidence in the Souvanna government. This would force the King, who insists above all else that the constitution be honored, either to appoint a new prime minister or to call for new elections. The Communists clearly would prefer that Souvanna remain as prime minister and almost certainly do not wish to be faced with the prospect of new national elections on short notice.

25X1

25 May 1973

25X1

25X1

INTERNATIONALChina Maintains Low Posture

China has been reserved in its public and private commentary on Indochina for some time, but particularly so during the course of the recent Kissinger-Tho talks in Paris.

Since its last authoritative public comment in late April, the Chinese press has passed up several opportunities to back up policy statements by Indo-chinese Communists. NCNA news accounts, moreover, have omitted much of the sting from those statements it has reported. The Chinese have excised criticism of US intentions, charges that Washington is threatening peace in Indochina, and charges of American violations of the Laos and Vietnam cease-fires. Peking's account also toned down the remarks of Le Duc Tho when he arrived in Paris in mid-May.

With the Kissinger-Tho talks in recess, on 24 May Peking publicly commented on Cambodia for the first time this month. A relatively brief article in *People's Daily* signed "Commentator" reiterated Peking's view that the key to a settlement is an end to US military involvement. The article said the "basic reason" for continued fighting is American bombing and intensified "military action." "Commentator" called for an end to the bombing and US aid

25 May 1973

to Phnom Penh, as well as a withdrawal of US and "non-Cambodian military personnel in the service of the US."

A consistent thread running through China's statements on Cambodia has been that American disengagement is essential to a solution. [REDACTED]

25X1

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25 May 1973